

Paul Dix, Taking Care of Behaviour, Pearson £16.99

When I was training, I watched a veteran teacher bring a rebellious Year 8 group to order simply by looking at them and waiting for them to fall silent. It was effortless and apparently magical. Was it, I wondered, something you were born with or a set of skills you could learn?

Paul Dix is a trainer for Pivotal Education, a behaviour management consultancy. He clearly believes (as I do) that effective behaviour management is a learnable skill. His book and CD cover such issues as consistency and clarity, language, giving praise and cover lessons.

Each chapter starts with the principle of an issue and follows with the practice, a smattering of examples, tips and then an exercise for self-assessment. So in the section on language we are advised to use “a controlled, respectful but flat voice” and to “breathe steadily but not audibly”. Paul Dix reminds us to use assertive phrasing such as “you need to” and “I expect”. There’s helpful advice on involving parents and managing extreme behaviour.

All of which is sensible stuff, and rooted in the philosophy of being clear, being consistent and giving lots of praise. But it is quite a dense and wordy text, with lots for us to take in. I can’t quibble with any of the content, which is consistently practical and reassuring. But by the end, rather than feel life as a teacher will be easier, it all feels a little dispiriting. There’s something slightly overwhelming about so much advice in this format.

It’s a reminder, perhaps, of how difficult it is to teach behaviour management in a book rather than through 1:1 coaching.

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